

THE WORD OF TEREGOR

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THE WORD OF TEREGOR

CHAPTER I

THIS is the story of the great long Woods, of the Oak that rules the Forest, of his fathers and of his children. It tells of the old tradition, the ancient fables and histories, the kingdom of to-day and the carrying-on into the future. It tells of the peace that has always been in the Forest and how Man came to lose it long ago, even before the numbering of the years. The Coming of Sound.

In the reign of the great Oak Teregor and in the reign of those before him there was peace throughout the Forests. He was ruler over all things, over the trees and bushes, the

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of Sound.

flowers and the grasses, and all the birds and all the beasts. Man was equal with the other animals and came within the dominion of the king. All living things held converse one with another, speaking truly every thought that arose within their hearts, and hiding nothing away. Nor was it possible, even if he had tried to do so, for one to hide away his thoughts, because in those days whatever was thought was already spoken and needed not words for it to become known. Full and lovely was that speech. No lie was there, nor any make-believe ; for Sound was not yet come, and none could say this thing, and mean that, but all things spoke by thoughts and looks and by the movement of their bodies.

The Mulberry - tree would say to Man : “ Now have my berries come to ripeness. Pluck thou the fruit

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that thy heart desires. I have brought the work of the season to perfection, and the time has come for me to rest and to spread my roots when the soft rains of autumn have loosened the rich ground beneath me. Fear not to take the treasures from my branches, because they have come to fullness and are ready to fall out of my hands. Yet leave enough for the Thristle, for whom I promised to reserve my berries.”

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of Sound.

So also with all the other trees that carry fruit. They would cry, “My fruit is ripe. Come and eat”; or, “Wait a little longer; my berries are not yet ready. Come again after a few days.”

When he heard that the berries were not yet ripe for eating, Man would answer and say, “I am hungry, yet will I not touch thy fruit. Hast thou heard tell of a tree whose berries

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of Sound.

are now ripe, and where I may now
appease my longing ? ”

And the tree would answer, “ Two chaffinches were but now sitting on my branches, of whom one said to the other that the fruit of the Black Cherry that stands in such a place has come to its fullness and is sweet.”

When any of the animals, searching for new pasturage, came down to the edges of the bogs that run between the long spurs of land, he would hear the thoughts of the Bog-asphodel and the Sundew, saying, “ Venture no further hitherward ; for the ground is soft and treacherous.” So the animal would turn and pass slowly up the side of the marsh till he heard the grasses calling, “ Here mayest thou cross, but go carefully, and ask before thou settest down thy feet.”

Listening then for the voices of

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the plants, who would be saying, The Coming
of Sound.
“Here thou mayest tread,” or, “Beware of me, for the covering of moss is thin and a deep pit sinks beneath me,” a beast would cross the marshes if he went warily and with a trusting heart.

So spake all things one to the other, not by sound (for Sound was not yet come), but by the thoughts that passed from each to each. All things moved without noise, and yet was there music in their movement. The wind blew and the great branches swayed, the rivers splashed and tumbled, and the lightning broke and flared from the thundercloud; but all was silent, and everywhere were peace and happiness.

King Teregor stood on that place which is called the Mound of Teregor to this day. It is said that his girth was greater than that of any who

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of Sound.

had gone before him, and that none have grown to equal it in all the years that have followed after. The last king was he that ruled over the whole land and over everything that had life. But in his reign there came the first of the rebellions and the first defyings of the authority of the Lord of the Forest.

Now one day Teregor felt within his heart that some great thing was at hand, and he was pondering what this might be. A full round wind came blowing from the south, surely and steadily increasing, never swerving in his course nor hesitating in his blast. Then King Teregor knew that this wind was bringing some great thing, and he spoke these words to those that were near to him :

“ Pass the word through all the Forest that a great thing comes, so that all may be ready.”

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Then tree bent to tree, and each spoke to his companion, and the word of King Teregor passed over the Forest. It sped across the heaths and waved over the long grasses ; and all the birds were ware of it and all the beasts and all the insects, because it reached everywhere and into the uttermost parts of the land.

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of Sound.

The wind kept blowing with a greater strength. Throughout the day it blew and throughout the night, until at last the great thing came. Some say that it fell from Heaven in the first blushing of the morning, others that it flew across the sky on the sun's red flames. Again there are those who say that it rode over the land on the lap of the clouds.

The whisper of it was heard in the distance, waxing louder and louder, as the voice of a gathering wind is heard to-day. The hills quaked and

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the valleys rang with it. It screamed about the rocky headlands, and on the wings of the hornet it hummed with a deep rich music. The brook marvelled at the clamour of his waters and at the whistle of the reeds and at the sigh of the trees that bent over his banks.

The sea felt his power and exulted in it. He swelled up his mighty waves and drave them towards the land. He arched them above him till their crests rocked and swung, and till the volume of the waters reeled at a great height, and flung itself with a roar upon the rocks and beaches. The trees wondered at the song of their waving branches, and all flying things were a-dread at the murmur of their wings.

Then the wind died down, and moved no longer across the land. All was silent now, for everything

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was motionless except the waters, who find their rest only in movement. The Coming
of Sound.

So was all quiet, save them alone. And in the stillness a round purple cloud rolled across the heavens, a cloud dark and terrible. It stretched across the sky in the semblance of the body of a tree cut from its branches and from its roots, and, as it was passing over the head of Teregor the King, the lightning flashed from it, and the great roar of the thunder was heard in the Forest for the first time, reeling over the long bending spurs, the pasture walks, and the marshy bottoms. Then all was still once more, and, as the long purple cloud moved away, naught was heard save the rippling of the streams and the stroke of the distant sea upon the shore. All the beasts stood motionless, and all the birds and all the insects were afraid to

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The Coming
of Sound. move their wings; for they knew
that this thing that had come upon
them was the voice of God.

While everything was hushed, in dread of what had happened and of what might come, a soft mellow note was heard through the stillness. It stopped suddenly, as if he who sang it were astonished and had made the sound unwittingly. Then it was heard again, this time timorously and with the voice of one who is making trial of his power, wondering if he may do again that which he has once done already. And even as a man who draws in colours and who is mixing paint with paint when he is thinking of other things—for his thoughts are not with his picture but mayhap with his friends that are far away—even as such a one may chance upon a colour that delights his eye and will stay his hand in

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wonder for a moment, and will then make trial of his paints once more, and mix an ampler store of the colour that has pleased him, so that he may exult in its glory when it is seen upon his panel, even so this single voice in the Forest seemed to chance upon its sound, and stop, and venture forth again, and begin for the third time, growing richer and bolder with every trial. At last, while all other things were mute with wonder, the voice that had been a slender piping swelled out into a flowing glory of trills and rhythmic melodies.

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of Sound.

Then those looked about them who were standing close to the place from which the song was coming. But they knew not what to search for, and, seeing no strange thing, they marvelled all the more. At length an Ash that grew close to the edge

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of Sound.

of a wood spoke to a young Birch-tree, who had been saying for a long time, "Oh ! I am so afraid ! Can no one deliver me from this ? Oh ! I am so afraid." The Ash asked the Birch for what matter she was crying, and why she thought that her lot was worse than that of other folk. Then the young Birch-tree answered with great fear in her heart : "It is the Blackbird, who is sitting in my branches. It is the Blackbird."

When the young Birch-tree had said this, the others looked up into her branches, where they saw the Blackbird sitting and pouring forth his song of rapture. Then the tidings spread far and wide of this new wonder, so that everyone was saying to his neighbour, "It is the Blackbird."

Now before the Coming of Sound the Blackbird was not held in such

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honour as the birds of brighter feathers. The Woodpeckers and the Kingfishers would lord it over the Blackbirds and the Thrushes because of the gayness of their colouring, while the Laverock would be held of little account by the side of the Goldfinch. As for the Nightingale, there were few who knew him at all; for the Nightingales come secretly in the beginning of the spring, and hide themselves in the warmth of the low thick bushes, and go away again as quietly as they came; so that there were few who ever saw them.

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of Sound.

After they had heard the Blackbird's song, all the birds made trial of their voices till the world was ringing with their calls. Some sang sweetly, while the note of others was coarse and bitter. And the Green Woodpecker said, "Can this thing

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of Sound.

be done by a Blackbird? Then I too must have a voice, and a better one than his." But when he tried to sing there only came a loud startling noise, as it were the laughter of an imp of wickedness, so that all things bade him hold his peace, and called him Yaffle, even as he is called to this day.

And every bird strove against his neighbour that the beauty of his own song might prevail. Nor was there any at whom they wondered more than at the Laverock, who began singing on the ground, and rose into the air with the joy of his melody upon him, that the other birds might see from whom the song was coming; for he would say in the pauses of his music, "See, it is I, the Skylark. Listen to the sweetness of my voice, and how I can make it swell and die as I sail downwards to the ground."

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And thereafter many of the birds were held in honour for the beauty of their voices, of whom until now but little reck had been taken. The Coming
of Sound.

And of the other birds and of all their songs and pipings, of the joyfulness of some and of the dumbness of others, of the clear note of this one and of that one's delicate whisperings, how can the tale be told, and to what length would go the chronicle? But here has been set down the true story of the old tradition, how the birds were first, after sound had come, to find the beauty that had been shed upon the world, and how first of all sang the Blackbird, even as to-day, after the hush, the fury, and the passing of the thunderstorm, the mellow pipe of the Blackbird is heard before the voices of all other living things.

CHAPTER II

Man's
Rebellion.

AFTER the Coming of Sound all things rejoiced and the world was full of music, and when the singing-time of the birds was passed, and the days grew hot and the heaths were breathless in the evening, then the insects took up the song and filled the air with hummings.

But when the knowledge of sound had come upon him, Man found that he could do that which the others could not, and that his tongue was limitless in the variety of its sounds. He became more cunning. Not so keen of sight was he as some of the other animals, nor so sharp as some in smell or hearing; yet he grew warier in his devices and more crafty

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with his thoughts. And when he found that he could hold converse with his brother by means of sound, and that no other could understand it, he became conscious of his cunning, and turned his thoughts towards getting the better of the others, thinking carefully how this might be done. But the other living things felt that there were unkindly thoughts in the hearts of men, yet knew not what to make of this ; for evil thinking was strange to them, and they could not tell what to bode from it.

Man's
Rebellion.

And Man knew that his thoughts had not been hidden, and he feared the power of Teregor the King. And he forsook the trees, and sat apart on a stony, barren piece of land, pondering secretly.

Then King Teregor said to the Leveret :

“ Unhappiness hath come upon Man.

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Man's
Rebellion.

He speaketh not his thoughts, nor doth he look upon us with love. Go thou to him and comfort him ; for he hath loved thee exceedingly and delighteth in thy grace and suppleness."

Then the Leveret went, and found him sitting on a bare mound, frowning with his brows and resting his chin upon his hand ; and the Leveret said :

" The King hath sent me to thee ; for thou art unhappy. Lo ! I am here for thy joy. Delight thou in my quaint paces. I can frisk. I can tumble. Look on my gambollings, and rejoice."

But Man scowled upon the Leveret and said, " Go ! Leave me in peace. What have I to do with fools and their folly ? "

And he picked up a great stone and hurled it at the Leveret, and would

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have crushed him had it not been Man's
Rebellion. that the Leveret leapt to one side and escaped. After that the Leveret returned to the King and told him, and since the day when Man first cast a stone at the Leveret, none of his kind has ever dared to come near Man, and the fear of Man is upon the hares and leverets more than upon any of the beasts.

Then Teregor the King called the Redbreast, and said to him :

“Go silently up to the place where Man is sitting, so that he hear thee not. Listen to his thoughts and bring me word of them again.”

And the Redbreast obeyed, and went ; and stood close beside him and listened. But Man saw him not, because he was gazing before him with hard eyes, nor ever looked to right or left.

Then the Redbreast came back to

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Rebellion.

the King and perched in the thickness of his branches and spoke privily to him.

“Man,” said he, “meditates rebellion against thee, Teregor, and against thy rule. He saith in his heart, ‘How shall I, who can move my body where I will, who can train my hands to craft, who can speak with my brother so that others may not hear, how shall I yet obey the bidding of a dumb thing, whose body may not move from the place where it rests?’ Such are his thoughts, O King. He seeketh to take from thee thy dominion over the Forest.”

Then was Teregor deep in thought for a long time. He wondered whether he should put forth his power and slay Man utterly, or whether he should let Man go his own way and do that which he desired. And he determined to let Man go free. So he

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sent the Redbreast once more, to summon Man before the King, saying, "The King knows thy thoughts, but he will not harm thee. Come, therefore, before the King, that he may speak with thee." Man's
Rebellion.

And the Redbreast obeyed the King and spoke as the King had bidden him. And Man, who was yet afraid of the power of the King, sent back answer by the Redbreast and said, "Tell the King that I come, since he has promised to do me no harm."

And thus it came about that ever since that day, when he passed to and fro as messenger between Man and Teregor the King, the Redbreast has ventured nearer to Man than all the other birds of the forest. He comes within the thresholds of men's dwellings and listens to what their hearts are saying. For he is yet the

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Man's
Rebellion.

messenger between men and the King of the Forest, if they should wish to send any message to the King.

So Man came and stood before Teregor, and fear was in his heart, so that he bowed himself before the King. Therefore there is a saying among the trees that Man is still subject to the King, because he bowed himself before him, even in the moment of his rebellion.

But Teregor said, "Rise up, and fear not ; for it shall be as thy heart desires. Thine shall be the dominion of the world, and all things shalt thou make subject to thine hand. With thine art thou shalt cleave the mountains and control the flowing of the rivers. Thou shalt learn to use the tools of the Creator that made thee. Thy cunning men shall find them and thy wise men shall explain them, until in the growth of thy

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power wonder shall succeed wonder and become a simple thing, while each age shall marvel at the ignorance of the last. Fondly shall thy reason account for mysteries, and expound the movement of the stars. By a folly shalt thou be duped, by the semblance of a power of creation ; nor shalt thou acknowledge in all thy works the eternal pulse of God and the Hand that ordereth the worlds. Man's
Rebellion.

“ Yet shall thy learning grow, and the wider it becomes the more wearisome shall be thy thirst for knowledge ; nor shall thy wisdom seem to bring thee closer to thy goal. For thou shalt always be striving after something that man may never attain unto, seeking for the perfection of what may never be made perfect ; yet so soon as thou dost cease from striving thou shalt fade.

“ Thou shalt be the enemy of all

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Man's
Rebellion.

other living things. By everything that moves and grows shalt thou be shunned. None shall trust thee, and often thou shalt long for the friendship of a wild animal. Even as thou dost struggle now to gain the mastery, so shalt thou strive with thy fellow, and by knowledge shalt hope to prevail against him. Peace shall be thine no longer, but God shall preserve in thy heart the memory of it, of that peace that thou dost lose this day in thy revolt from the Lord of the Forest. Hear now my last word, that he who looks for peace again may attain to it only by sorrow, and must come to the trees for his teaching, bowing once more to the dominion against which thou hast rebelled."

Then Man went from before King Teregor, and the King let him go in peace. The animals shrank back to let him pass, and the trees leaned aside

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to make a path for him, and he went out into the world alone. Man's
Rebellion.

And in the Forest was never known again that same peace that there was before the Coming of Sound, because Man was feared and because he waged a war upon all other things. His needs became more wide, so that he put snares for those who had been his friends, and laid waste great stretches of the Forest to build shelters for himself. For that which had been easy became a thing hardly to be borne. Without the warm love of the trees, the rain and the frosts were a burden, and the trees that had been wont to offer him their fruit were unwilling to do so now ; nay, many of them made thorns to guard their treasures from his hands, so that he was fain to make the fruit-trees captive, and protect them round about, and train them to bear fruit against

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Man's
Rebellion.

their will. He hunted the other animals and slew them; and wherever he has hunted, there the low bushes and the brambles grow, to tear his limbs and to cause his feet to stumble, and to be a shelter for those whom he pursues.

But in that part of the Forest, and only in that part, where stood once Teregor the Great King, and where Forgar reigns to-day, there no brambles grow beneath the trees, and peace is shed about the wood even as it was before man's rebellion. For the hunter has not come to it, and men are always held with awe when they approach the resting-place of the Lord of the Forest.

CHAPTER III

Now after Man's rebellion there were some men who could not bear to look upon the trees whom they had known, and whom they knew no more. Sorrow abode with them, where once they had had happiness. And unrest came over them and drove them forth from their old country. They wandered out into unknown lands, searching for the friendliness of the woods ; for without trees no man may live in peace. They passed over the wide plains and grassy valleys, for ever faring northwards, hoping to come to some land that fell not within the rule of the great Oak. Yet for a long time the trees shunned them in whatever place they travelled.

The Coming
of the
Pine-trees.

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The Coming
of the
Pine-trees.

At length they came to a northern land where the sea flows up between the mountains, and the mosses grow soft and deep, where the woods rise up into the clouds and the lakes lie hidden in the lap of the hills. And here they saw a new world. The heavens seemed more vast, and their eyes were opened to wider visions, and what had seemed large became now a little thing. And, most wonderful of all, they saw new trees, trees that grew straight and tall and thick, rising slender as the grasses to such a height that their width was hardly felt. The colour of their bark was as the colour of the distant ranges, and though it was winter their branches spread out at a great height into a deep rich green. And when they saw these trees the men said to one another, "What new wonder is this? What is this tree, that has a winter

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foliage even as a yew-tree, whose stem rises so straight and reaches to the clouds ? ”

The Coming
of the
Pine-trees.

Then they passed further into the land and went among the trees, and as they came into their shadow they felt no more the dominion of the Oak-tree ; for the Oak was not there, and the name of Teregor was but a fable in the land. But the Beech-trees were the rulers, nor was there any one king among them, because where the Beech-trees rule no need is there of a king ; for all things there are clothed with the faithfulness shed about them by the Beeches, and all disputes are brought into their circles that a settlement may be found.

And when those men who came to this country found that they were beyond Teregor's dominion, and that the trees were kind and spoke to them, they thought that it would be good

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The Coming
of the
Pine-trees. to live for ever there ; and they came
to love the tall trees with the deep
green foliage, and they would stand
and listen to the music of the wind in
their branches ; for their song was
a new song to them, and held no
memories. So was it the sweeter,
because it put away all yearning for
the country from which they had
come.

Then would they have stayed in
this land for ever, and would have
lived under the dominion of the
Beech-trees, had not they become
aware that the woods were already
peopled with a strange dancing folk,
whom they understood not, and who
vanished mysteriously into the roots
of the trees. And these small people,
who might only be seen dimly, and
who moved so swiftly and silently
among the trees, harassed the men
who had newly come into their

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country. And the men were filled with a new terror, the terror of faëry dangers in the darkness, and of the little feet that pattered to and fro, and of the weird faces behind the tree-trunks. Soon the fear of the little people was so strong upon them that the burden of it was too heavy for them to bear it longer. The yearning returned for the country that they knew, and they went back over the tall hills and the mighty rivers, across the wide plains and the grassy valleys, and came once more to the country where the Oak is King. But before they departed they sought one with another how they should keep the music of the tall dark-green trees. And they gathered his seed, the seed of Rorne the great Pine-tree, the largest and the tallest of his kind, and carried it back to their own country, and planted it round about

The Coming
of the
Pine-trees.

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of the
Pine-trees. their dwellings, and made great woods
of pine where the Oak and the Holly
and the Ash had grown.

And to this day men love the music of the Pine-trees, and they come to live in their woods, because they know that the Pine-tree, too, does not acknowledge the dominion of the Oak. Yet is there lamentation in their song, because they long to be again in the northern land, the country of their fathers, where the little folk live among the Beeches and the sea-waves roar upon the feet of the hills.

Now these things happened in the days when Mit the Terrible was King. Teregor had died, and the trees had stood round the place where he had rested, and had covered him with their falling leaves ; and since the death of the great King Teregor, the mound has risen slowly over the place where he stood, and two trees have always

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 33

mourned upon it, even as the Ash mourns there to-day against the Yew-tree, singing a dirge for Teregor.

The Coming
of the
Pine-trees.

And when Mit saw the woods of pine that men had planted for a protection, he sent his word to them over the heaths and said :

“ Come ye with peace ? Do ye bow to our dominion ? ”

But the Pine-trees were proud and answered haughtily :

“ We know of no dominion. We are of the seed of Rorne, of the stock of the great Pine-tree in the Northern Land, where the Oak is unknown and the Beech-trees bear rule over the Forest. If we want a King, he shall be of our own people.”

Then Mit sent word once more, saying, “ It is well, if ye come in peace, and if ye encroach not upon the Forest, nor go beyond the boundaries wherewith man has encompassed you.”

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of the
Pine-trees.

But the wind carried the seed of the Pine-trees further into the Forest, and the birds dropped it as they flew, so that it took root in the heathy places and came nigh to the ancient woods of oak and holly, until Mit was wroth and said :

“How shall we bear this thing? Strangers have come among us and stand in the midst of our country, and yet will not bow in obedience.”

Then Mit put a curse upon all the trees that grow upon the heath, saying, “Ye shall spring joyfully from your seed, and in the first years of your growth your shoots shall be fresh and beautiful. But after that the ground shall become hard and shall grip upon your roots, so that they shall be turned backwards and never spread into a wide compass. So when the happiness of your youth is gone, your life shall become a thing

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of pain and your hearts shall be broken by the vanity of your strivings ; and when anyone shall pass by you, he shall say, ' This is no tree, but a mere bush.' ”

The Coming
of the
Pine-trees.

With these words Mit the Terrible cursed the Pine-trees, and to this day the trees that stand upon the heath are short and squat and stunted, and the ground presses hard upon their roots and bends them till the sap can run no longer.

But even after this the seed of the Pine-trees was carried further and further into the Forest, till the hills were dark with them and the heather was overshadowed. Then Mit bethought him of the plan that gave him the name of Mit the Terrible, because of the slaughter that it made and the devastation that came thereafter.

First he sent a warning to the

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The Coming
of the
Pine-trees. heather and to all that lived therein,
saying, "Those who may, depart ye
from the heaths and take refuge
beneath the Beeches and the Oaks.
And those who may not move, sink
your roots deep into the ground that
ye be not utterly destroyed."

Then the stone-chats and the other
little birds that love the heather and
the furze flew to the glades between
the oak-trees, and the bees ceased
from their labour and went among
the woods, and the grass-hoppers
sought the damp grass in the marshes,
and the beasts forsook the open land
and took shelter underneath the
ancient trees. And all the heaths
were silent ; for no bird nor beast nor
insect who hearkened to the warning
yet remained there. The heather and
the furze struck their roots further
into the ground, and waited.

In a little while, far away to the

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south-west, a thick grey cloud was seen. It rose sluggishly from the earth like a great ball, and the vapours of it hung close together. Those who saw it from afar said, "What is this cloud that falleth not from Heaven, but rises as the mist in the evening from the ground? Yet so dense is it, one would call it a mountain that moves." It rose ever thicker and thicker, and volume was piled heavily upon volume, like the distant thunder-clouds in summer, and it rolled onward steadily before the wind. Soon some deer and ponies, who had not obeyed the warning of the King, were seen galloping before it wildly, splashing over the bogs and speeding over the long ridges. And their cry was terrible, for it said, "Fly! Fly! For fire has come upon the Forest!"

The Coming
of the
Pine-trees.

Then the word passed throughout the length of the land that the Forest

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The Coming of the Pine-trees. was burning, and the trees stood in terror of the approaching cloud.

It swept over the heaths like a wave upon the low sands of the shore. Its flame was felt from afar, and the roar of it was as the roar of a falling mountain. And the wind, according to the commands of Mit the Terrible, refrained and urged the fire in turn, and drove its long curved line across the heaths, and warded it from the ancient woods of oak and beech and holly, so that it devoured only the places where the Pine-trees grew, and left the grassy glades unharmed. Terrible was the shriek of the Pines that stood in its way. They winced and bent at the heat of its breath, and in a moment they were eaten up. And wherever the seed of the Pine-tree had fallen on the heaths, there the curling flame was driven, from one end of the Forest to the other,

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leaping across the brooks and gliding over the even places, screaming and crackling with the clamour of a thousand trees that fall in a gale, lapping up the stems with its tongue and swallowing the branches, and never staying its fury till, sated and weary with destruction, it sank to rest upon the stony shores of the sea. So the fire abated, but where its path had been, there was nothing but emptiness and desolation.

The Coming
of the
Pine-trees.

And the earth was bare. The heather-plant was but a charred stick, a skeleton from which the flesh had fallen, and of the glory that had been upon the land nothing remained but the rising and the dipping of the hills. The Pine-trees were demolished, yet not utterly ; for of the trees whom men first brought from the Northern Land, some were not destroyed, that the seed of the Great

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The Coming
of the
Pine-trees.

Pine-tree might endure in the Forest, and that their music might be heard for ever. But the children of Rorne did not multiply, nor ever dared again to take root upon the heaths. They shun the boundary of the Forest, the boundary that was made by Man, and stand only in those places where their forefathers stood when the fire spared them, tall and strong and beautiful, glorying in their ancient Northern blood.

And they glory the more because, many ages after this, in the reign of Forgar, who reigns to-day, men came from another country across the sea, carrying the seeds of other pine-trees of another stock, and planted them even as they had planted the seeds of the Great Pine many years before. And these new trees have taken root and grow in great abundance. But though their song is sweet and though

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 41

men love to hear them about their dwellings, yet they cannot grow as grow the Pines of the old Northern stock. Therefore, those with the ancient blood, whose bark is smoother, and whose stems grow thick, and whose shoulders are creased with the weight of their great arms, glory over the foreign pines and make small account of them. But these have grown and multiplied exceedingly, and have spread and cast their seed over the heath, even as it happened in the days of Mit ; nevertheless they grow only in their youth, till the hard earth grips upon their roots (for the curse of Mit has cleaved to them), and never can they become great trees. To this day fires break out upon the heath, and leave barren stretches in their track. And the bright forest grasses spring up quickly afterwards, and soon the heather shoots once more, with even

The Coming
of the
Pine-trees.

42 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Coming of the Pine-trees. greater beauty. But the Pine-trees die and never rise again. And when men see the fire, they wonder whence and how it came.

CHAPTER IV

ANITH THE BEAUTIFUL stood in the olden time not far from the place where Anith the young ash-tree stands to-day. All have heard of her beauty, how wondrous were the lines of her body, and how rich was the splendour of her leaves and branches. The Osier said, "Anith the ash-tree is more supple than I am," and the Beeches said, "Her bark is smoother than ours," while the Lilies said, "She holds her head more gracefully than any of our kind."

The Story
of Anith the
Beautiful.

Upon her the sun would pour his brightest ray, and the clouds would shift that she might not rest in shadow. The winds sought her out among the other trees, and played in

44 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Story
of Anith the
Beautiful.

her branches and swayed her to and fro, so that you might see her moving gently this way and that way, while all the trees were motionless around her. But there was another ash-tree who also was very beautiful, yet not so beautiful as Anith, whose name was Milvene. And Milvene was jealous, as an ash-tree is prone to be, and often would complain that Anith was more beloved for her beauty than herself. And one day Milvene spoke these words to Anith :

“ Vain art thou in thy beauty, and thinkest thyself lovelier than any other thing. Yet this is not so. For in the winter thou art bare and naked, and thou dost lose thy soft leaves, as any other tree, and thy glory is gone until the spring return again.

“ Look then on the beauty of the Pine-trees, even the trees that Man has brought from the Northern Land,

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 45

whose green never fades nor ever falls from their tuneful branches. If thou art fair when thy buds begin to show or when thy leaves are full, yet how far greater in the winter months is the glory of the Pine, from whom the splendour does not pass away ! ”

The Story
of Anith the
Beautiful.

And when the winter came, and the flowers were all asleep, and the birds stood and listened to their breathing, their soft breathing underneath the ground, then Anith remembered the words of Milvene, and her soul was troubled. For she knew that the green was yet upon the clustered branches of the Pine-trees, while her own body was bare, and her robes had fallen to the earth. Looking on the place where they had fallen, she wept for a little while, forgetting the beauty of her curling stem and the grace of her limbs. And as she wept she saw the green Ivy stretching hither and

46 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Story
of Anith the
Beautiful.

thither beneath her feet, wandering where it willed upon the ground and showing bright amongst her own dead leaves. And the sight of it put envy into Anith's heart, and a terrible thought came upon her. For she spoke to the Ivy and said :

“ Fair Ivy, why should thy beauty be so little seen ? Half covered art thou by the leaves that fall upon thee, and only by looking down can one see how fair thou art. Thou hast no stem to carry thee aloft into places where thy beauty would gladden everyone's heart. Yet why, thou who mightest grow in all directions, why dost thou always choose the ground ? See, my stem is ready for thee, the fair stem that so many love, and my branches that strike out into the air. Come, fair Ivy, approach and climb upon me, and wrap thy green about my limbs, that thy glory may shine

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 47

throughout the wood, and all the trees may say, 'How beautiful is the Ivy upon Anith! Even in the winter her raiment is finer than the raiment of the Pines!' "

The Story
of Anith the
Beautiful.

Now before this the thought had never come upon the Ivy that it might climb the trunks of trees, so that the Ivy was astonished and said :

"How can I do this thing? For the place for Ivy is upon the ground."

But Anith answered :

"Do this; it is but a small thing I ask of thee. Draw near and make the trial."

Then the Ivy drew near, and glided over her feet, and clung to her smooth stem, and climbed slowly upwards and clothed her body with kisses, so that Anith sighed and said, "None has loved me as the Ivy loves." After a little while the Ivy had spread also

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The Story
of Anith the
Beautiful.

to her branches, creeping round and round ; and when the winter came, Anith stood covered with a deep green robe, a mark among the other trees ; and the tongue of Milvene was silenced.

But when a few years were passed, the Ivy pressed closer upon her limbs and drank the strength from her sap, till Anith cried :

“ Press not so hard ; for I am faint, and my body may not breathe.”

But the Ivy answered :

“ My touch may not be loosened.”

And Anith spoke again :

“ Climb not any further. Remain so, even as thou art. For if thou growest more, my life shall be wrung from out of me. Have pity, gentle Ivy, upon Anith, Anith the fair, the beautiful, who has loved thee and has taught thee how thy glory can be seen. Thy touch that was so tender

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 49

has become hurtful. So hard is thy grip that my skin is cut beneath it, and thy kisses have become wounds.

The Story
of Anith the
Beautiful.

Yet might this be borne, because thou art so beautiful ; but leave thou my young branches, that my blood may run into them and swell them out, and that I yet may breathe and live."

Then the Ivy answered :

"I cannot choose but grow. My tendrils must find a place to hold. My touch may not be loosened."

And the Ivy spread more and more, and closed over the limbs of Anith and wound always about her in every part, till her cries and weepings grew more faint, and her leaves ceased from bursting and her branches became dry. Then the spirit left her body, which stood there as a stricken thing, and the arms where the tender leaves had waved were dead and jagged. So died Anith the Beautiful,

50 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Story
of Anith the
Beautiful.

the fairest tree that ever stood in the Forest, choked by the Ivy that she had called unto herself.

And even to-day the Ivy fears to grow upon a tree until the tree has called it; but although they all have heard the story of Anith, yet the trees heed not its warning and will often ask the Ivy to come to them. For the pride of growth is upon them and they think that they are stronger than the trees who have died before, and that they are able to shake off the Ivy when they wish. So it has become a saying in the Forest that Anith brought a curse upon the trees, because she it was who first put the thought amongst them of asking the Ivy to clothe them with its lovely raiment.

CHAPTER V

TO-DAY Forgar rules in the Forest, and of him this tale is told, how there came to the trees a man who had sinned and who yearned for peace, and how he stood as suppliant before the King, and of what the King thought fit to do, and of what happened after this.

The Shoulders
of the King.

Now the land round about the old resting-place of Teregor is broad open land, unkept, uncultivated, even as it was in the days of Teregor the great King. The heaths run for many miles, and the waters pass from them into the marshes at their feet. The woods rise on the small sloping hills, or wind along the banks of the secret rivers. The paths go wonderingly and

52 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Shoulders of the King. without direction, for they were made by those who had no care within their hearts.

One day a man was walking in that country. He came out of the Pine-trees and paced slowly over the wide rolling heath.

When he arrived at the bending of a hill he stood for a while motionless. Below him was spread a covering of golden gorse, and the bog-myrtle showed bronzen in the marshy places. Beyond this to the north lay an ancient wood along the slope on the further side. The green leaves of the Birch-trees shone so brightly that they were green no longer, and made more black the darkness of the Yews. The young leaves of the Oak were swelling, and the Ash-tree was beginning to burst his buds, and the surface of the wood looked soft, rippling, and velvety.

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 53

Then came to him a longing to reach the wood, and he looked about searching for the best path. But he knew that there lay a great bog between, where a man may hardly pass during the dry season, and he knew that it stretched for a long distance up the valley to the east, and westwards as far as the road ; and he wondered how it might be crossed. Then, seeking up and down for a place with harder ground, he saw a spot where the bog seemed to be drawn narrower, and where there stood a small clump of birch-trees, hidden by the hollow and by the high wood on the near side where only the oak and the holly grow ; and, going down the hill where the slope fell steeper, he came to the place where the birch-trees stood. There he found a little rivulet rushing between two solid mounds of good hard earth. It ran

The Shoulders
of the King.

54 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Shoulders
of the King.

for a few yards only, gathering and constraining the waters from the marsh above, and opening out below into soft and treacherous land. He leapt the brook and passed beneath the branches of the birch-trees and made forward towards the wood with eagerness.

When he came to the edge of the trees he hesitated. Around him a soft wind was breathing, rustling in the twigs of the small bushes and singing the gentle music of growing things. But from the wood there came a murmur, something that the heart could feel, though the ear could not perceive. It was something pure and unhidden, breathing softly of peace and loveliness. And he, though he had been longing for this thing, was in fear of it ; because he did not know what it was, and because his heart was on fire within him. The

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 55

murmur for a moment seemed to grow fuller, and in that moment he stepped forward, and passing between a yew and a holly he found himself within the shadow of the wood.

The Shoulders
of the King.

In those few steps the murmur had ceased suddenly. He was grasping at the fleeting thing, straining his senses to find it again as it seemed to pass away into the distance. A hush was upon all things, and everything was still and strange. He seemed to have passed into a different world, to have gone behind a secret curtain. He walked a few paces, but the leaves cried aloud beneath his footsteps, and he was afraid; for all other things were silent. The trees seemed to turn from him, as they would shun that which is unclean; and as a company of revellers, dancing and carolling, will cease suddenly from their merry-making if an enemy has

56 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Shoulders
of the King.

come amongst them, so the trees held back, nor were willing to trust him that now stood in their midst. And then his heart surged up within him, and at the last he spoke aloud.

“Alas!” he said, “even the Trees turn from me, who can see the stain beneath. I speak to you, to all of you; Trees, Trees, hear what I have to say. I am bad, I am evil, yet have I not come in enmity. I come in friendship and with a kindly heart towards you. There is agony in my soul and I am looking for its rest. If I am unwelcome, yet bear with me for a little, and for the briefest time at least be kind to me; because I long for rest and peace.”

He spoke thus for a little while, recking little of what he was saying, until he found that he was speaking strangely words of which he had not thought himself.

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 57

“There is a King,” he was saying, “there is a King; you shall know him by his shoulders. There is a King; you shall know him by his shoulders——” It was as if some unknown voice had spoken. The thought was not his thought, the words were not his own. He felt them now on all sides of him, and his tongue caught them up and spoke them. “There is a King,” he said; “you shall know him by his shoulders.” And then came to him greater courage, and he moved slowly through the wood. Now and again he stood beside a tree and laid his hand upon its trunk, speaking to it as he had already spoken. Nor were his words unheard, but the spirit of each tree would seem to come forth to him and answer him again, and to this one he would speak as he would not speak to that one; for he spoke truly from

The Shoulders
of the King.

58 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Shoulders of the King. his heart, and no tree is like his neighbour.

Now he saw that in many places two trees or even three would be growing up together, springing almost from the same stump and entwining their branches with one another. Stem stood close to stem and bark rubbed against bark. Here was an ash-tree between whose roots a holly had grown ; their boughs met, and kissed, and separated once more. There was an oak growing up between the branches of a yew-tree. On all sides he saw trees thus gathered into little companies. An oak, a holly, and a yew perhaps, would stand in the same place ; one root would cross another and in turn be crossed once more until the ground was patterned over with their crawlings. Or a holly would grow straight up from the ground between a yew-tree's

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 59

roots, as if he were a great stake driven into the earth, and would rise close by the yew's body and press himself against the warm red bark, and twist about in the maze of his branches. The Shoulders
of the King.

He wondered, too, at the ground on which he trod, for there was no undergrowth. Leaves and moss made a smooth carpet for his feet. Here and there was ivy upon the ground.

And he came to a tree, a tall young oak, whose bark was hardly rugged yet, and round whose stem was climbing a strong and pitiless growth of ivy. It twisted once about his lower trunk and then ran upwards quickly till it came to his branches. There it spread over the tree and was winding round his limbs. When he saw this he said to the oak these words :

“ Young Oak, ivy is very beautiful ;
it grows cunningly up your body and

60 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Shoulders
of the King. clothes you with beautiful robes. But
it chokes ; it kills ; ivy is death to
trees. See, I will free you of your ivy
and will save your life."

So saying, he severed the ivy from
its roots with a great knife he carried,
and passed onwards, further into the
wood, bearing the same thought with-
in his heart, "There is a King ; you
shall know him by his shoulders."

And he stood before a great yew.
The running lines of his bark swept
and flowed up his broad trunk and
mingled mysteriously into the joining
of his branches. Long rolling creases
were drawn beneath his arms where
they curved with the weight of the
limbs above them. Infinite were the
changes in his knots and crevices, his
swollen joints and liquid bendings.
All this he saw, wondering at the age
of the tree ; and, walking round the
wide body, he saw a place close to the

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 61

ground where there was a large oozing wound. There was coming from it something ugly, something red, almost of the colour of blood; and pity moved him when he saw this, and, stepping to a shallow pool close by, he gathered some moist lichen and washed the bleeding from the sore. Then he stood up and spoke these words :

The Shoulders
of the King.

“ O Yew, of subtle wisdom, who hast known so many seasons, speak to me some word of prophecy. Is peace to be found by man on the earth ? ”

When he said this he seemed once more to catch the sense of that beautiful murmur that had passed before him when he came into the wood; and this time it seemed to say, “ Look round about. Peace is here.” These words were ringing over him, and in the same way his

62 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Shoulders
of the King.

own tongue laid hold of them and spoke them. He turned and gazed about him. There was the shallow pool where he had plucked the moss, circled by a gently rising bank. Its soft wet places merged invisibly with the harder ground at its side, and it was brilliant with the green of the marsh-loving flowers whose buds had not yet come to bursting.

Then he passed on through the wood, his thoughts echoing the message of the Trees : " There is a King ; you shall know him by his shoulders. There is a King ; you shall know him by his shoulders."

At length, walking slowly and with no fixed direction, he came to a place where stood a great massive oak. Not so tall was he as some others close at hand, but his girth was much bigger, and when he had risen the distance of twelve feet from the

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 63

ground his trunk swelled into an enormous breadth where the great branches sank down into the strong wide bole that carried them. Round his feet there grew some young hollies, and behind him was a thicket of birch and holly, making in that place the skirting of the wood.

The Shoulders
of the King.

The words burst from him ungovernably :

“ And thou, great Oak, I know thee ! Listen : for I have many things to say, and thou art the first that shall have heard them ; and it is right that I should say them to thee, because here thou art the King ; I know thee by thy shoulders. Listen then to the confession and the prayer of one who is an outcast from his own folk, who can go no longer among them, and who is stained with a defilement that he cannot purge away. Many are the months that have

64 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Shoulders of the King. passed since the day that I did this evil thing. Men loved me. All the world was kind. And yet I betrayed my fellows. I betrayed myself, my own people, and, worst of all, I betrayed my friend. The world shivered at the horror of the deed, and to the agony of mankind I have added a thousandfold ; and yet there is none, saving the God above, that knows that the treachery was mine. I allowed my friend to suffer when by a word I could have saved him from his sorrow. I have lied to myself and to all men. Nevertheless, God was kind to me, and made a time when my sin might have been confessed, when I found a soul that loved me, ready to hear and ready to forgive. But I was too vile, too proud ; and I hardened my heart and laughed at the good that was trying to rise within me. Then I knew it was too

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 65

late, and that I must live for ever The Shoulders
of the King.
with this secret loathing of myself
beneath my heart.

“ I went away among new people and came to different countries, trying to forget the evil I had done. But everywhere I found in the faces of all men a mirror in which I could see my crime. I tried to change my thoughts by intercourse with others, and I sought those places where men live in multitudes. But no comfort did I find from them, and my wound was the more grievous. ‘ For a crowd is not company ; and faces are but a gallery of pictures ; and talk is but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love.’ I heard them speak of treachery, I was forced to speak of it myself, and this added to my agony. I saw in other men all the good things that I might have been ; their beauties only recalled my loathsomeness, their

66 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Shoulders
of the King. happiness increased my sorrow. I have longed for the whole human race, men and women, to be as vile as myself. The sight of children, innocent and clean of evil thoughts, has filled me with a lust for cruelty. I have spoken harshly to them, deceived them, and caused them suffering with a revelling purposeful heart. Peace for me is no longer possible among my fellow-men.

“ And now, O King, I stand before thee and I ask thee for thy help ; for I have thought that the Trees alone can ease the burden of my soul. O hear my prayer—and yet I know not for what I pray. I pray for peace and for the kind soft tenderness of the Trees. I pray not for forgetfulness, but for the mourning that is blessed, for the sorrow that sheds tears of peace and beauty. Great Tree, hear thou my prayer ! ”

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 67

He ceased, and stood listening for an answer ; and, wonderful to say, an answer came. The day was still. The little breeze that had been had died away and had left everything silent and unmoving. Yet as he finished speaking a quivering seemed to pass along the trees, beginning faintly, hardly to be perceived, but swelling gradually into a great rush. Its volume bent the trunks and strained the branches, and the earth shook as with the tread of a giant's feet. He held his breath in wonder, and, as the roar of the wind passed away again, he cast himself on the ground before the great-shouldered Oak and wept silently, freely, and without a movement of his body.

The Shoulders
of the King.

CHAPTER VI

The Moot of **THEN** the word went through the
the Trees.

Forest that a man had come, to whom Forgar the Oak had bent his head. And all things wondered, saying, "Can this be? Hath a man arrived who can talk the talk of the Forest as he did in the olden time? For what did Forgar bend his head, and what meaning is there in this?"

And Forgar sent his bidding to all the trees to call a Moot. The Hollies that were his pages passed on his word to all the woods, that all were to make them ready for a Moot, because a man had come and had bowed himself before the King and had understood some of the sayings of the trees, and because the King would

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 69

know in what manner he had held intercourse with the other trees. The Moot of
the Trees.

And the word came back from Kornak, who stands by the river at the place called Kornak-ford, and who is Forgar's under-ruler in that part of the Forest, that the man had not passed that way. And Rogan the lone Beech-tree, the under-ruler of the wood of oak and holly on the top of the hill, sent back word also, saying, "He passed beside us, but came not in. He passed down the hill and over the ford beneath the Birch-trees. We know nothing of him, but he had the scent of the Pine-trees yet upon him." The tidings came over the heather and the bog-myrtle that he had come across the heath from the pines and had gone back along the eastern path. And Forgar frowned, because the Pine-trees are not in his dominion. But he heard from the

70 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Moot of
the Trees.

tall silvery Birch with the double stem, who stands among the Pine-trees, that she could see the place where he went to rest and that he had spoken pleasant words to her, but that she could not remember what they were, or whether he had said them that day or the day before.

And the other trees laughed when they heard the Birch's words, and they said to one another, "Can a Birch-tree remember anything?"

But in the ancient wood where Forgar stands there were many trees to whom the man had spoken; and these came forward and gave their account. The tall young Oak from whom the man had cut the Ivy was the first to speak.

"This man," he said, "is an overweening fellow; for I am older than he is and yet he thinks himself the wiser. On no tree had the Ivy grown

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 71

more beautiful than on me. I have felt its warmth in the winter time and I have thought with pride of the loveliness of my raiment; and the other trees have looked on and have envied me in my deep green robes. Then this man comes to-day and cuts the stem of the Ivy pitilessly. Since the deed I have heard it moaning about my branches, yearning in its death-cry for the touch of the limbs that it has loved. And soon its leaves will wither and the soft young tendrils will dry and crack, and I shall be clothed with a beautiful thing no longer, but with a dead thing, ugly and sorrowful. For the Ivy is loving and faithful, and even in death clings to the body of a friend. I shall weep as I watch the spirit passing from its leaves, as I feel its touch grow feebler, and as I hear its voice slowly dying into nothingness.

The Moot of
the Trees.

72 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Moot of the Trees. That is what this man hath done for me."

And Forgar said, " Hold thy peace, my child. The day shall come when thou shalt know that he did well unto thee. But thou art young and art vain as a young ash-tree, and knowest not that Ivy is a temptation to trees and an enticement, and that its kiss may be the kiss of death. Hast thou forgotten the story of Anith the Beautiful, who brought this curse upon the trees? Think thou of that and be thankful for thy deliverance."

Then the young Oak was silent. But he kept himself apart from the others and cherished his sorrow for a long time; and the other trees were kind to him and spoke to him gently, knowing the bitterness in his heart.

And Vigar and Enteth, the twin oaks, came forward next and spoke.

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 73

Now they stand on the long ridge that leads from the north to the great mound, called the mound of Teregor, in the south-west corner of the wood. They stand together, with the distance of two full paces between them, and they have risen upwards side by side, curving their bodies with the same curve and spreading into branches at the same height. And Vigar spoke before the King :

The Moot of
the Trees.

“ He stood between us, O Forgar, and laid his hands lovingly upon our bodies, and said these words : ‘ Brother and Sister, twins, who have grown together, who will live together and die together, be faithful in your friendship and keep no secret one from the other ; then shall you have happiness.’ And turning to me he said : ‘ Thou, her Brother, who art strong, be careful of thy charge. Watch over her and ward the dangers

74 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Moot of
the Trees.

from her ; for she is more delicate and her beauty is more frail.' These were his words, O King, and he looked upon us gently and passed on northwards through the wood."

And the next one to speak was one of the Hollies that stand in the dancing-ground to the north-west. Now the shape of the wood is like the shape of an hour-glass, and a broad path of grass divides it in the midst ; and in the space between the two halves of the hour-glass gorse and bracken grow in abundance. In the southern half are King Forgar, and Vigar and Enteth the twins, and the great mound of Teregor, where the Ash mourns against the Yew-tree, and where the two lovers, the Wild-Service and the Ash-tree, have mingled their stems and branches in their love. In the northern half you may see the shallow pool and the

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 75

curious piece of land that is nearly an island, and the old Yew, whom the trees call Sork, standing close by. The shallow pool divides him from the higher ground, the place called the dancing-ground, where the Hollies leap and frisk and play about with wild contortions, and where stands the Yew-tree whose trunk is cracked with laughing. For the Hollies are the clowns of the Forest, and grow fantastically into surprising shapes, and cast their limbs about them with weird turns. Wild and terrible are the grimaces that they make, and endless are the pranks they play on one another. Where there are Hollies there is always laughter ringing through the wood. So one of them spoke before the King, one of the merriest of all the Hollies.

The Moot of
the Trees.

“Truly, O Forgar, this is a man of great sense. For I have seen other

76 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Moot of men go by—though this has not been
the Trees.

often—and I have heard them laugh at their own thoughts and at each other's sayings. But never before this have I heard a man laugh at *me*. He stood before me and said that I was a jester, that it was of no use my pulling faces in order to frighten him, because they would only make him laugh, and when he saw the human eyes that I have drawn upon my body—it is known, O Forgar, that I have lost branches in order to do this—he laughed and laughed until I felt uneasy, and I wondered for a moment whether he were mocking me. Then he came closer and stroked my bark, and I remember the words he used. 'Holly-clown,' he said, 'it is a good thing when the heart is in agony to find one such as you. Nothing is sweeter than laughter, and I could wish to stand by you and laugh at

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your antics until the very death of laughter. But listen : I must go, for other things are calling me, and there is an ache in my heart that kills. Remember, should it happen that I may not stand here again, that there came a man who understood you and knew the prettiness of your jests and the true meaning of your comedy.'

The Moot of
the Trees.

"He turned, and I pitied him in that moment, because he spoke from his heart, and I was in sorrow when I thought of his unhappiness. But even then I played a jest upon him ; for as he moved away I caught his hat with one of my fingers and threw it to the ground. And he looked up at me saying, ' And that, Holly-clown, was the neatest of all jokes, and the boldest at such a moment.' I could see the tears in his eyes as he laughed, and I was sorry for what I had done.

78 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Moot of
the Trees.

And indeed my sorrow was heart-felt, even though, as I confess to thee, O Forgar, even though I cut the most ridiculous of capers behind his back as he passed away from me in the direction of Sork the Yew-tree and the shallow pool above him."

And Forgar answered him, "Well spoken, Clown. But be thou more careful in the timing of thy mischief, lest thou do a harm to them that love thee."

When the King had finished speaking with the Holly there came forward an Oak, ugly and crooked in his limbs, who spoke with a low snarling voice so that all about him shivered. He stands at the far end of the long ridge that leads to the mound of Teregor.

"O Forgar," he said, "this man is evil, and unbridled in his tongue. He spoke to me with words of inso-

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lence and loathing. 'Cruel Oak,' he said, 'thou that hast no pity and no good thoughts for other folk. See how this young Ash, who grew so gracefully and prettily, has struggled to find a path for her head through thy branches. And thou, instead of loving and helping a beautiful young tree, and instead of making a way for her body to pass, hast thrust her trunk aside and hast torn the skin from her soft young limbs, so that now her beauty is lost for ever, and she stands among the others a maimed thing, piteous to see. But yet hast thou been punished for thy cruelty; for now the Ivy grows upon thee and thou art stunted, and thy spirit is being crushed; and I would deliver thee from it, from this thing that kills thee, but that I know that thou art wicked and envious of all that come nigh thee.'

The Moot of
the Trees.

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The Moot of
the Trees.

“ These were his words, O King, and all know that they are unjust. For I stood upon this place before the young Ash came ; and even before her coming it was difficult for me to grow, because my roots on one side have only soft wet land to spread in, where the water stands in the winter months, and where only plants that love a bog may grow and flourish. And when I asked the Ivy to grow upon me, it was not for the reason for which the other trees ask ; nor was it because I hoped to be made more beautiful, but because I took pity on it ; for, knowing my own ugliness, I thought that it would be a wasting of the beautiful Ivy not to allow it to pass over and to hide my unshapely limbs. As to the Ash, what have I to do with her ? She came unasked, and it was she who hindered me in my growing and not

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I that did her harm. So this man The Moot of
the Trees. speaks spitefully and says things not to be endured, and should he come in the night-time I should put forth my power and crush the life from his body with the great arm of mine that stretches towards the ground."

And Forgar answered him, "Thou evil tree ! Well art thou called Vaka, for thou art subtle in thy wickedness, and thou canst persuade thyself that thou art good. But I tell thee that it is the truth that this man has spoken, and that thy brothers have shuddered at the cruelty of thy deed. Take heed, therefore, and carry my warning in thy heart. If thou put forth thy power at all to harm this man, or stretch out thine accursed arms against him, then shall I send on thee a blast that shall wither thee where thou standest. Remember the punishment of Nogram, whose

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The Moot of the Trees. skeleton stands rotting at the northern end of the wood; and the Hollies stand about his loathsomeness and mock and bend their fingers at the horror that remains. With a blast of my wrath I slew him, and even with such a blast shall I slay thee, if thou disobey me in this."

And Vaka the Oak slunk back to his resting-place, in terror of the King.

After Vaka the Oak, a young Ash-tree came to speak before the King. She stands hard against the mound of Teregor at the place where the long ridge dips gently; and she is famous for her beauty. So beautiful indeed is she that the trees have called her Anith, after Anith the Beautiful who brought a curse upon the trees. For she is of the blood of Anith even as Forgar is of the blood of Teregor the great King. And to-day the trunk of Anith flows upward like the

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 83

flowing of a stream. Tall is her body, and smooth, sinuous, and undulating, and the loveliness of her curves is as the line of the long rolling hills. Close to her stands the Yew-tree that guards her so faithfully, encircling her stem with longing branches, yet never daring to touch her tender body.

The Moot of
the Trees.

“This youth, O Forgar, is gentle and kind,” she said, “for he called me by pretty names, and put a yearning hand upon my stem. And he said that he had seen beautiful women, but never one so beautiful as I am, nor one more peaceful in her loveliness. Yet he told me to beware of being over vain, though ever to rejoice and thank God for my beauty. Then he commended me to the protection of my Yew-tree. ‘Trust him,’ he said, ‘for he is kind, and he watches over you with a loving tenderness and his

84 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Moot of the Trees. wisdom is very great.' And when he went from me, O King, I felt that my soul was gladdened by his words."

Then the King spake gently unto Anith and questioned her, and Anith answered the King truly ; and when he had finished speaking with her, he laid his hand softly upon her and blessed her, and Anith returned to her resting-place joyful with the blessing of the King.

And after this Forgar pondered awhile, and then spoke to Sork the Yew-tree, whom he honoured chiefly of all his councillors ; for Sork is deeply learned ; and although he is so crafty and so wily in his contrivances, yet can Forgar see into his heart because he is the King. So he asked of Sork whether the man had come his way, and what he counselled the King to do concerning him.

And Sork spoke before the King.

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 85

Now while he speaks he is for ever shrugging his shoulders and twisting about his branches, and half closing up his eyes. And it is the cunning of his thoughts that makes him do this. So now he wriggled and looked warily from his eyes as he wove this subtle counsel before the King.

The Moot of
the Trees.

“O Forgar,” he said, “thou hast many powers that no other tree has. And it is not right that I should tell thee when thou art to use them. But as to this man, I hold his coming of good omen, because my wound is better; and when he asked me whether peace was to be found upon the earth for man, I bethought me of the powers of the King, and of the ancient words of Teregor, and I sent him onwards to thee, O Forgar. I have naught else to say, O King.”

Now Forgar understood from this that the man had washed Sork's

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The Moot of the Trees. wound and that Sork wished not that the other trees should know of it—

for the other trees around him were asleep with the slumber that is wafted from the pool, and had not seen what the man had done. And he also understood the meaning of the other words concerning the powers of the King. But of this he said nothing, and kept his thoughts secret, as the King may, and he spoke to all the trees with these words :

“ Pass the word through the Forest that all are to treat this man with kindness, because he has come to learn the language of the Trees. Let all be open with him and speak that which is in their minds with trust. For I, Forgar, love him.”

And the Moot was broken up and each tree went to his resting-place and the word of Forgar the King was passed over the Forest.

CHAPTER VII

Now all the trees were in readiness for the man to come to the wood a second time. The Hollies in the dancing-ground were eager in their expectation, and Anith the young ash-tree was longing for the touch of his gentle hand. Forgar the King had laid a plan and was turning in his heart the means of its fulfilment. But the morning passed, and the man came not, so that Forgar became anxious and sent to ask for tidings of him. And when the tidings came that he had not yet left the Pine-trees, Forgar laid a stern bidding upon all the heaths to keep a careful watch and to send news of him from what part soever of the Forest he should go through.

The Way
across the
River.

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The Way
across the
River.

Soon the news came from the western heaths, along the spurs of land and the cotton-grass in the marshes, over Kornak-ford and up the glade of the mighty Beech-trees, to the heath on the top of the hill and the ancient wood where Forgar stands, saying, "He passed with the speed of the thistle-down before a gale, nor rested till he came to the iron road at the stopping-place of the rolling wheels."

Then Forgar understood that he was returning to the great city, and was wroth in his heart and said, "Man is fickle-minded, and in a moment his will is changed. Yet this man is good; for he cometh not to hew nor to burn, and his words flow from his heart, and he easeth my children of the ivy. Therefore will I send a sign, that he may know of my displeasure."

So King Forgar sent forth a great



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breath westwards, which flew across the heaths.

The Way
across the
River.

Now the man was waiting at the stopping-place, looking backwards along the road by which he had come, and as he stood thus gazing mournfully, he was aware of a surging wind about him, and he felt again the murmuring of the trees. But there was wrath in the murmur, and he heard the voice of the King saying, "Woe to him who found welcome in the Forest and yet turneth away." His will was cut asunder, thinking this way and thinking that way, whether to go to the great city and the habitations of men, or to go back across the Forest to the trees. And all the while he was encompassed by the words of the King, "Woe to him who found welcome in the Forest and yet turneth away." He heard the roar of the rolling wheels coming from the south,

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The Way
across the
River.

speaking of men and of the unrest of the multitude, and he felt in his soul the calling of the Forest. But the breath of Forgar blew so strongly upon him that the yearning for the Forest prevailed ; he walked suddenly into the road, and, crossing to the heather on the other side, he made forward with long and eager steps in the direction of the ancient wood.

And the tidings came to Forgar that the man had turned again and was striking back across the heather, so that Forgar said, “ ’Tis well. He obeyeth the bidding of the King.”

Now the sun was already low in the sky, and the man knew that he must hasten if he must come to the wood before the fall of night. So he lengthened his stride and opened his shoulders bravely, rejoicing in the bold music of his swinging paces. But before him stretched a low-lying piece

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 91

of land with bogs winding at the feet of the deep-heathered ridges. Beyond this he could see the line of the Secret River, whose waters are hidden by the trees that are on either bank. To the river he only knew two fords, the one that the trees called Kornakford, where stands Kornak the under-ruler, who rests his arms upon the ground, so terrible is the weight he carries, and another far to the north where the road crosses. Now the way to either seemed too long, for Kornak stands at some distance to the south from where he was, so that he determined quickly to make straight for the river in front of him in the hope of finding yet another ford. Thinking thus, he passed down from the long spur where the heather grows deeper than in any other place on the Forest, and, leaping warily from tuft to tuft—for he was lithe and active and knew

The Way
across the
River.

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The Way
across the
River.

well the signs of the surer footholds—he came to the edge of the trees at one of the bendings of the river.

Here was a grove of Beech-trees standing on a mound that sloped down to the soft banks of the river, where the yellow flags bloom thickly in the month of June in grassy openings between the trees. And the kindly Beeches, who divined his purpose, were encircling him with their thoughts, giving warning that he could not cross in that place. But the fever of haste was upon him, so that he heard them not. Tempted by the smooth, meadow-like land upon the further side, he walked down the slope from the Beech-trees and approached the banks of the river with bold steps.

When he had come within a few paces of the water, he waited for a moment ; for the stream looked deep

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and already he felt the softness of the ground beneath him, and a murmur in the air seemed to tell him to turn back.

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across the
River.

Hard by the place where he stood was a rugged Oak-tree, who grew another arm to bear the weight of the heavy limb that stretches across the water. When he saw this tree, he thought, "How can such a tree grow if the ground be treacherous?" But he marked not that the Oak stood further back and that its roots were planted in the sloping ground. So he made his clothing ready and stepped into the gentle stream; but his foot sank deeper and deeper in the soft mould beneath the water, so that he lost his balance and would have fallen, had not he thrown his arms aloft and had not the watchful Oak bent down his long branch and guided it into the grasp of his out-

94 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Way
across the
River.

stretched hands. Then he held firmly to the branch and drew himself back to the land once more, blessing the tree for his timely help.

After this he said to himself, "I was a fool; for I felt the warning of the trees, but I took no heed. Henceforward I shall go by such paths only as they show me."

He passed back to the grove of Beech-trees and stood wondering which way to turn.

"Gentle Beech-trees," he said, "show a wayfarer the road, the road across the river to the King in the ancient wood."

Thereupon the trees seemed to say, "The Trees speak not to him that will not hearken. The Trees speak not to him that will not hearken."

Then he went sadly to a Beech-tree close by that grew with a double stem. Where the two stems joined

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there was a space, wide and flat, inviting the traveller to rest. Sitting therefore on this space, with a hand on either stem and with his eyes looking upward into the branches, he spoke these words :

The Way
across the
River.

“Honest Beech, I hearken now. If I took no heed before, this was because my feet were hastening and because I could brook of no delay in crossing the river and in coming to the King ; for the night approaches, and men cannot see in the darkness where to put their feet. So speak to me again, because I know I may trust your bidding.”

Then the Beeches took pity on him, and, remembering the words of Forgar, they opened to him their hearts once more. He felt them murmuring, “The path down the stream. The path down the stream.” Then he rose joyfully and saw a path

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The Way
across the
River.

with Hollies growing on either side, and as he moved away he felt the Beeches breathe another warning :

“ Two Oaks point. Heed not the first ; obey the second.”

Soon he came to a place where another path crossed his own, leading down to the river's bank. There he saw an Oak whose lowest branch grew in the semblance of a man's arm, with a hand pointing down to the waters of the river. His stem was tall and beautiful, yet was there something, some evil hidden thing that was lurking in his presence. The path tempted, for it was clear, and the bank looked hard and even on the other side, with an open space where no trees grew. But the words were yet in his heart, “ Heed not the first ; obey the second,” and he went forward, passing the pointing Oak on his left hand. And as he passed he

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seemed to hear the voice of a cursing thing, and at the same time the thoughts were waved to him from an Ash-tree close at hand. "Pass on while there is yet light. In the darkness he may strike thee." Then he walked forward quickly until he was beyond the shadow of the Oak, when he laid his hand upon the Ash-tree and turned and looked backwards at the tree behind him; and he saw that from this side the Oak was grim and horrible. The arm that pointed to the river was lifted up as if ready to strike a blow and throw its victim into the waters, while his trunk was grown over with an ugly fungus in the shape of a monster's open jaws. He shuddered at that and turned again, walking further down the path.

The Way
across the
River.

And he came to a place where an Oak stood in the midst of the path. On one side its branches had spread

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The Way
across the
River.

round in a circle, as if gathering together all things that came within their reach and softly turning them in the direction of the stream. And although there was no pointing branch nor any outstretched finger, yet with his sweeping branches and with the leaning of his body he guided all passing things to a place where the river flowed over shoals of gravel.

Here he crossed the river easily and pressed onwards through the trees on the further side. But the night was growing dark and he knew that the light would have gone by the time he came to the ancient wood, so that his heart was a-dread within him, fearing the power of the trees. Yet he went forward with the greater haste in the hope that a little light would remain. And now he could see the wood dimly on the slope before him; but in the darkness its

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 99

shape was not clear enough to show which part was which, and the wetness of the marshes had forced him to pass further to the north than he knew.

The Way
across the
River.

His reckoning, too, was faulty, for he had crossed the river at a place not so southerly as he had thought, so that when at last he stood beside the wood he fancied in the darkness that he was in the open space between the two parts of the hour-glass, hard by the resting-place of Forgar the King; when in truth he was at the outer end of the northern half, close to Massima the Mother of the Birch-trees.

Now Massima is very old, and she has been the guardian of the Birch-trees for a very long time, and she was made their guardian by Forgar, because the Birch-trees, who are so gay and careless, and who are always

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across the
River.

playing in little paltry ways, were for ever hurting one another by mistake, or suffering from some unhappy chance that overtook them in their play. When the Birches are playing they laugh and shimmer with delight, and their voices are more delicate to hear than those of any other forest tree. But at the smallest pain their laughter turns to weeping—so tender, so timorous are they. In the Forest they stand most often round the edges of a wood, or cluster together in an open place, where there is light and air and room for their hearts to run and frolic. The darkness in the density of the trees pleases them not, and they are always held in terror by the Yew-tree, whose subtle teasing jests they cannot understand, and whose craftiness is very awful to them.

Now the ancient wood has many Birches running round its edge, and

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 101

their laughter is clear and childlike and makes the other trees laugh too. The Way across the River.

But many years ago, when Forgar had only yet reigned for a short while, the little mournings and unhappinesses of the Birch-trees who came to him for guidance, the multitude of their petty troubles, and the mingling of their gaiety and their sadness became vexatious unto Forgar. For a Birch would speak in tears to Forgar of some mishap and would suddenly stop and forget what was left for her to tell, and her sorrow would vanish into laughter once more.

So the King, who had more weighty matters in his charge, and had but little time for the hearing of these things, determined to put Massima, the strong wise birch-tree, over them, who should watch these light and variable people and keep a guard upon them, and should be called the

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The Way
across the
River.

Mother of the Birch-trees. And he placed a guard about her, even the royal guard of Hollies ; for Hollies stand round all the trees of royal blood, and all those who are set up in authority.

So Massima stands to-day at the corner of the wood. Her stem is gnarled and rugged, and so great is her strength that she has gripped and crushed the Ivy that grew upon her with the enfoldings of her bark. The pattern of it runs hither and thither along her branches like great outstanding veins, and the spreading of her arms above is so wide that one would say that it was the span not of one birch, but of many birches.

When Massima knew that the man was standing near her, she cast her thoughts about him, for she was fearful for his safety. And he felt her speak to him :

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 103

“The woods are perilous in the darkness. Venture not therein. The woods are perilous in the darkness.”

The Way
across the
River.

Then he looked up and saw by her young leaves shown against the sky that it was a birch-tree speaking, and he answered in these words :

“ I will not forget thy warning, tender Birch-tree, but yet I must needs come to the King. 'Tis the nature of the Birch-tree to be timid, but in the end the bolder course prevails. So shall I pass into the shadow of the wood, and the kindly Oaks and Ash-trees and the dancing Hollies shall guide me on my path.”

When Massima saw that she could not bend him from his purpose she shed over him a second counsel, saying :

“ Beware of Rak the hornéd Oak, who stands to the north-west of the shallow pool. Beware of Rak.”

Now these words made him the

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The Way
across the
River.

more bold, because the shallow pool is in the northern half of the wood and he thought that he was standing by the southern half, close to Forgar and the mound of Teregor; and he said to himself, "Then the danger is far removed, if this Rak is all I have to fear." And Massima divined what was in his heart; but before she could say aught, he was gone from her and had passed into the darkness of the trees.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was so dark that he could hardly see the distance of his outstretched arm. He peered forward, but could see nothing but a blurred form here and there where the shadow seemed even thicker. But he wondered most at this, that he felt again the murmur that he had known when he first came to the wood, but this time it was more full and it did not cease when he came nigh to it. He noticed that whenever he strained with his ear to catch its sound it would grow fainter, and that it was stronger when he was not trying to give it form. It was as if the air was full of the mingling of many thoughts, not merging one with another, but each one remaining

The Horns
of Rak.

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The Horns
of Rak.

whole and unchanged until a new thought came to take its place. Sometimes it seemed that the sense of one would come to his heart, and he believed that himself was being spoken of amid the murmur, but he could not tell for certain. But the air held more than this. He knew that things were passing him on this side and on that side, and above his head. Once he tried to grasp something that was moving slowly in front of him. He could not see it nor hear it, nor could his hands touch it. But he felt that it was there, that it was moving and thinking, that in some way it was speaking, though when he tried to clutch at it he was conscious of it no longer.

He moved slowly forward, feeling with his hands in front of him, till his fingers touched the bark of Ogath, a tall young ash-tree that stands in

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 107

that part of the wood. Now she had heard the words of Anith at the Moot of the Trees, and she was jealous of her and of what the man had said ; for it is the nature of the ash-tree to be so. So when she felt his hand upon her body, her heart was filled with bitterness, meditating evil against the man and pondering craftily.

The Horns
of Rak.

Then first she spoke to Koderon, the great Oak with the cluster of surging branches, which grow so close and are so many that there is hardly space between them. So Ogath spoke to Koderon ; for she was afraid of him and of the trust put in him by the King. But when there came no answer from Koderon the Oak-tree she was glad, because then she knew that his spirit had gone forth and that only the body of Koderon was in his resting-place.

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The Horns
of Rak.

Next she spoke to the man, saying, "I love thee. I am the beautiful Ash-tree by the great mound." This she said, knowing that he would think that she was Anith. And when the man felt these words he passed his hand over her bark, and it was smooth ; yet he wondered to himself, thinking, "Was not her stem more slender ?" But Ogath said again, "I am the beautiful Ash-tree by the great mound. I love thee." Then he was persuaded that it was she, and he came closer to her and leant his body lovingly against her. At this Ogath was the more bitter, because she knew that his love was not for her, but for Anith ; and she spoke to him once more :

"Stretch thy hand from tree to tree. Choose ever the nearest trunk. Stretch thy hand from tree to tree."

Then he thought that the Ash-tree

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was showing him the path to the King, and he stretched out his right hand till he touched the stem of a Holly-tree. The bark felt cold, so that he shivered and said aloud, "Is this the right path?" And Ogath answered, "Stretch thy hand from tree to tree. Choose ever the nearest trunk." But the Holly made no answer; for his spirit had gone forth to the dancing-ground, and there was no thought remaining in his branches.

The Horns
of Rak.

Now at that place in the wood are half a score of trees growing in a straight line, standing near enough together for a man to stretch from each to each between them. The kindly Holly with the bull's face stands amongst them, but his spirit too was at the dancing-ground, while all the other trees are discontented, small, and evil—for even as his heart,

110 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Horns of Rak. so is the body of a tree. Along this line the man swung from tree to tree, and they, who had heard the words of Ogath, spoke them to him again, the two stunted Oaks, and the Oak that grows like a serpent, and the Hollies who are for ever complaining and care not for the merriment of the dance. Again and again he heard the same words, and although he felt another, softer thing about him that was trying to make him hearken, yet he believed; for the language of the trees was yet strange to him, and he said to himself, "If I obey not the voices of the trees, I shall fall, even as I fell at the river's side."

When he came to the last tree in the line he felt it quiver as with excitement, and he stretched out his hand as before, but found nothing. A dry grinding sound seemed to be in his ears, through which he felt the

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 111

words, "Step out, and stand before the King." The Horns
of Rak.

Then, when he had stepped forward, he felt a sudden pang in his heart, as if some sharp thing were trying to pierce it; his hands grasped a cold spear-like arm in front of him, which swayed him from side to side and lifted him off his feet. He was drawn high above the ground until, looking downwards, he could see the great horns of Rak ready to pass through his body when he had been poised above them and let fall by the spear that carried him. He held the more tightly with his hands in terror of what was below, but Rak shook his branches and sent great jerks along the spear so that soon he would be able to hold no longer. He knew that in a moment he would fall, when suddenly a great rushing passed through the air. Then Rak shook with a

112 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Horns of Rak. rocking even greater, so that his hands let go and he fell downwards towards the curved horn beneath.

But in that moment something swept forward, as it were the hand of a giant, and came between him and the horns of Rak, and received him as he fell, and gathered him and entwined itself about him. Now this was one of the hands of Koderon—for the great rushing had been the movement of his spirit returning to its resting-place—who drew him away and gently lifted him and put him down in safety upon the ground close to his own round bole. He lay there as one stunned, for he was yet stricken with the fear of Rak. But Koderon soothed him and spoke tenderly to him until he felt these words about him: "Fear no more. He cannot harm thee now. Fear no more."

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He rose from the ground, and feeling round the trunk of Koderon he sat down in the space between two of his roots and spoke aloud. The Horns of Rak.

“Who art thou,” he said, “so gentle in thy touch and so comforting in thy sayings, who hast saved me from the horns of Rak ?”

The answer came : “Speak not with words, seek not for symbols for thy thoughts ; then shalt thou be heard. Search not with thine eyes ; then shalt thou see. Heed not the sound in thine ears ; then shalt thou hear and understand.”

When he heard this answer he held his peace, and leant backwards against the tree in wonder ; for now he knew that his heart and not his ears had felt the voices of the trees, and he understood that it was their soft murmuring that grew more faint whenever he strained his ears to find

114 THE WORD OF TEREGOR

The Horns
of Rak.

it. "Can I then," he thought, "attain to the King to-night, if I put no trust in my eyes and ears and obey only the bidding of my heart?"

"Rest here for to-night," answered Koderon, "for I came but now from the side of the King, who knows that thou art here. Rest thou here for to-night."

And the man thought, "Is this best? Will not the King be angry?"

But the answer came, "Thou canst not pass through the wood; for the trees are terrible in the night-time, and there are many who would deceive thee, and lead thee on the wrong path, because not yet dost thou fully understand their language. When the moon shall rise thy danger shall be greater; for to man a shadow is a thing of terror, but it is the plaything of the trees and a deadly weapon when they will. So venture

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no further to-night, but rest here and sleep till the morning comes.”

The Horns
of Rak.

After this, Koderon spoke softly to him and soothed him with waves of gentle thought, until sleep came over him to give rest to his heart and body.

CHAPTER IX

The
Healing of
the Wound.

HE woke with the springing of the day, and found himself beneath a noble Oak with wide-spreading branches. On one side a bough had grown, which was so heavy that it would have fallen to the ground, had not a Yew-tree hard-by caught the limb between his arms and borne the weight of it. The Oak was speaking to him, saying, "Rise. Forgar the King awaits thee. Pass through the wood by Sork the Yew-tree, whom thou knowest, and up to the dividing path that touches on the dancing-ground ; then turn down into the smaller trees, past the Ash whose knees are bending gracefully, and go forward round the skirting of the

THE WORD OF TEREGOR 117

wood. But leave not the shelter of the trees before thou comest to Forgar ; for the scent of the wood is now shed about thee, since thou hast slept with an open heart beneath my branches ; and it is well to go before the King so.”

The
Healing of
the Wound.

He understood the words of Koderon the Oak-tree, feeling them yet plainer within him than heretofore. For at first, when the trees had spoken, he had said the words himself, wondering the while whence had come the thought. But now he felt the thoughts within his heart, as if they were his own, and his tongue had no wish to speak them, because they were made known to him, not by any symbol, but by the passing of thoughts from one heart to the other.

“Look now at Rak,” said Koderon, “how quiet he seems. Go not too near, for though he cannot harm

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The
Healing of
the Wound.

thee now, yet it is not good to make him angry."

Now Rak is very old. His bark is black and rugged. He is not tall, but his breadth is very great. His body bends forward so that his brows overshadow the passer-by, and four jagged limbs spring out from his shoulders as the horns of a great beast. Looking at him from the other side, a man would say, "His head is as the head of a monster beetle. See the wickedness of the curved horn below." A straight sharp lance juts out on one side, even the lance that pierces in the night-time, and carries the victim above the horn of death.

And when the man shuddered at the sight of Rak, Koderon spoke to him again, saying, "Draw aside thy raiment and see the mark over thy heart, where he struck thee with his lance. Then would he have pierced

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it, had not a tree's love stood between him and thee. For there is one tree that loves thee above all the others, and she it was who put a fence about thy heart. The wound from Rak yet bleeds ; her touch alone may cure the bleeding.

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“ Step forward now through the wood, for Forgar is in readiness.”

Then he thanked Koderon the Oak-tree and bade him farewell, and as he passed from under him he heard Koderon say once more, “ Seek not for symbols ; then shalt thou hear and be heard.”

Soon he stood before the King, and bowed himself, and they held converse one with another. But of what the King said and how the man made answer the tale may not be told ; for their thoughts were sacred and were of the wonders for which men have no words.

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When they had spoken for a little while Forgar was pleased with him, and said :

“Go now. Pass where thou wilt within the wood, but go not forth from it, that the scent of the trees may cleave to thee and become a lasting thing. Go now, and heal thy wound with the touch of the tree that loves thee.”

Then he left Forgar and wandered about the wood once more, but the wound over his heart was hurting him, and the pain of it grew more burdensome. He remembered Koderon's words, “There is one who loves thee above all the others ; her touch alone can cure the bleeding,” and he was wondering which tree this might be.

“In this wood,” he thought, “are so many trees, many that I have not even seen, while already there are not

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a few who have spoken to me kindly. The
How, then, shall I find the tree that Healing of
loves me best ? ” the Wound.

And the trees about him answered,
“ We may not tell. Thy heart alone
can find her.”

Then he looked about him in the
hope of seeing some sign ; but he
saw nothing, and he felt again the
words of Koderon the Oak-tree,
“ Search not with thine eyes ; then
thou shalt see. Heed not the sound
in thine ears ; then shalt thou hear
and understand.”

Now when he tried to do this he
found that once more there was that
strange soft thing before him that
he had felt when he came into the
wood at night, that had vanished
when he tried to clutch at it and
had tried to warn him when he was
coming near to Rak. But this time
he did not try to touch it nor to see

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it, but he followed after it dreamily and trustingly, gazing upwards with unheeding eyes and taking no thought of any other thing. The further he followed the more clear it became to him, but all the time the soreness round his heart grew worse and he felt that he could hardly move his limbs.

Then came the thought, "Courage! Endure a little longer. Press on while thou yet hast strength."

He struggled forward blindly, following, following, and fighting against the stiffness that was creeping over him. At length, when he felt he could bear the pangs no more and that his body was almost dead, he urged himself forward with a last effort. Then his limbs gave way beneath him, and he laid his hand upon the wound and sank backward powerless to the ground. And as

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he lay there something moved his hand away and rested where it had been. Its kiss was so light that his body could not feel it, softer than the kiss of the sea-mist upon the pine-trees, and more healing than rain on a dry and thirsty root. The ache in his heart grew less, and there came over him the loveliness of fading pain and a weariness that was beautiful, till his eyes closed and everything grew dim, and forgetfulness was shed sweetly about his spirit.

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the Wound.

He woke as from sleep, and was lying upon the gentle slope of the long ridge. The pain in his heart was gone, his body numb with a stillness of content. Above him rose Anith, the beautiful Ash-tree, and the tenderness of love filled all the air about him.

And Anith said, "Move not thy

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body, but send thy spirit forth to me."

Then his soul rose up within him and surged forth and mingled with the soul of Anith, and their two thoughts became as one thought and all things were forgotten by them in their happiness.

He that wanders to-day in the ancient wood may rest him on the mound of Teregor, where once stood the great King, and where the Ash-tree mourns against the Yew. Looking up along the ridge and resting his eyes on the place where it dips gently by the side of the great mound, he will see the graceful stem of Anith and the Yew behind that guards. But to-day the boughs that encircle her so tenderly and ward away all other

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things enfold too the straight clean
body of a young Oak-tree, who
rises from her feet and stretches up-
wards, gliding over her curves and
mingling branch with branch.

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the Wound.